

Be sure you know where the bus is going before you get on it.

...great advice for school children and business leaders

On the first day of school, I overheard a mother tell her young daughter “Be sure you know where the bus is going before you get on it”. “Know where you’re going” seems like a straightforward statement. How often in business or in life are we so concerned with the complexities of a situation that we miss the uncomplicated?

Over 20 years ago, Robert Fulghum wrote the book *All I really need to know, I learned in Kindergarten*. Fulghum lists learned behaviors: play fair, share everything, clean up your own mess and when you go out in the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands and stick together. This book contains a plain, down-to-earth message about responsibility. Today, we are in a more complex world. Have we forgotten the lessons from Kindergarten? As we read the business news, how often do we hear about playing fair and sharing? In the midst of the financial crises, were businesses asked to take responsibility and “clean up your own mess”, or did we look for someone else to solve the problem?

The lessons learned in kindergarten help us focus on the basics - the simple and seemingly obvious rules that if observed can make life easier and if ignored can really get us hurt (look both ways before crossing the street). Fulghum’s book helps make this point. It’s simple, but that’s the point- “keep it simple”.

President Obama, in a televised address to American school children, helped reinforce these basics. He urged them to focus on the long view by taking responsibility for their own education beginning today.

Similarly, in business we must focus on the long view. There are simple and obvious rules in business that are all too easy forget. We tend to get distracted and lose focus in the heat of battle. We become shortsighted. But in these times we need to take the long view in our own businesses. We need to make the effort to plan and invest wisely in ourselves and our business. Getting distracted from business basics now can have serious, negative, long term consequences. Investing in our business now, especially in our products, services, people and technology can have great long-term benefits.

Like the mother’s warning to her daughter we must understand where we are going. We need a goal with a plan that includes our investment of time and money. We might call this our due diligence, focusing on the basics, a process to seek the truth, where all of the factors that make up our plan are uncovered and understood.

In July, I purchased The Presidents Forum, an organization that helps small business owners succeed. I believe in investing in products, people and technology to achieve goals and succeed. On September 22 & 24, I will be hosting my first two business events. Starting in a new business for me evokes the same feelings as starting Kindergarten. I ask myself -Will I make friends? Will I have fun? Will I know anything?

Starting something new is both scary and exciting. Re-reading Fulghum’s book reminded me of behaviors for success: keep things simple, focus on the basics and take responsibility for your own actions. If we plan well and follow through, success usually finds us.

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